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Inside Washington



Senators Ask Probe of CIA Cover-Up in Pope Plot

Senators Alfonse D'Amato (R.-N.Y.) and Steve Symms (R.-Idaho) have asked President Reagan to investigate charges made by NBC News that CIA officials have tried to discourage the investigation of Soviet involvement in the plot to murder Pope John Paul II.

In a January 31 letter, the Senators noted that the plot to murder the pope has "enormous implications for U.S.-Soviet relations and the prospect for arms control negotiations" and that the CIA's reported behavior in the case "is very puzzling." They also said that a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on the matter "may also be appropriate."

On the House side, as previously noted by HUMAN EVENTS, Rep. Larry McDonald (D.-Ga.) has asked President Reagan, CIA director William Casey and the House Intelligence Committee to investigate the same charges.

In an interview with HUMAN EVENTS, D'Amato charged that CIA officials have "deliberately misinformed" the American people about the Italian investigation by leaking stories to the press that cast doubt on the International Communist connections of Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who shot the Pope.

D'Amato, who was recently in Rome talking with Italian and American authorities, said that CIA officials are trying to push the view that Agca was a "madman" and that his confession of Bulgarian complicity in the crime is not credible.

Asked if the CIA has tried to obstruct the investigation, D'Amato said, "I think they've done something worse. I think they've deliberately misinformed. And by way of misdirection and putting out misleading statements [they] have helped to create an atmosphere of confusion and doubt with respect to the integrity of the investigation."

"Responsible people close to the investigation," he told us, "are mystified as to the motivation for the U.S. carrying out this campaign of disinformation."

The New York Republican said that he was told by a Vatican official that during the height of the crisis in Poland, when the Soviets were threatening to invade, the Pope warned then-Soviet dictator Leonid Brezhnev that he would "be with his people" if the Soviet tanks rolled across the border.

D'Amato said he provided this account to the CIA in October 1981, and gave them the name of the Vatican official so the agency could confirm the story. Yet, D'Amato said, he recently discovered that this information had not been disseminated to other important CIA officials.

The handling of this information, D'Amato indicated, reflects the fact that the agency isn't really following the investigation and the evidence which has been uncovered. "They haven't assigned one agent to this case," D'Amato revealed. "They tell me it's a low priority."

"I don't want them to interfere with the Italian investigation," he continued. "But I certainly think we have to explore the facts to the best of our ability, so we can be in position to aid the Italians in their investigation."